

# To Give Witness to the Resurrected Messiah

——Luke's Presentation of Peter and Paul in the Acts of the  
Apostles. Part I: Peter——

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## Abstract

The first part of the study concerns Peter as the witness to Resurrected Messiah. Peter, as the head of the Twelve, is presented by Luke in three elements regarding the proclaiming of the kerygma. The first regards proclaiming the kerygma to inhabitants of Jerusalem, the second concerns the proclaiming the kerygma during the conflict with the Sanhedrin, and third shows his stand for the truth of the kerygma. The study focuses on Peter's contribution to shaping the basis of Christian doctrine.

## 1. Introduction

The Gospel according to Luke openly presents the negative impact of the events related to Jesus' death and resurrection on the disciples (Lk 24, 1–52), who were lacking in courage during Jesus' trial and did not have sufficient faith to believe in His resurrection (Lk 24, 11–12). For this reason, Luke's Gospel ends with an extensive narrative concerning various activities of Jesus aimed at building up the disciples' faith in His resurrection (Lk 24, 13–52). This faith was indispensable for the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation that concerns not only the act of the salvation itself (Jesus' death and resurrection) but also proclamation to the whole world that God's promise has been fulfilled. In this plan, the disciples of Jesus were designed to become the witnesses for Jews (Lk 24, 47–48) and for Gentiles (Ac 1, 8). The theme of being witnesses to Jesus' deeds, introduced briefly in Luke's Gospel, is developed strongly in the second part of his work, the Acts of the Apostles, where the author presents the realization of Jesus' mission in very skillful way that includes, among many other elements, diversity of locations, several agents, and a wide range of particular topics. All the literary devices used by Luke in Acts, such as narrative, speeches or dialogs, serve to present the main topic of Acts, which concerns the disciples as Jesus' witnesses to the whole world.

## 2. Analysis of the speech of Jesus (Ac 1, 4–8)

<sup>4</sup> *While staying with them, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but await the promise of the father. He*

said, “this is what you have heard from me: <sup>5</sup> John baptized with water, but after a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit”. <sup>6</sup> Those who had gathered together therefore asked him, “will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> He said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has decided by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive a power from the Holy Spirit coming upon you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth”.

The speech of Jesus in Ac 1, 4–8, which is also the first speech in Acts, develops the theme that has been introduced in the last speech of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel (Lk 24, 47–49)<sup>1</sup>. The common features in both speeches are presented in similar contexts (Jesus’ departure with the disciples), but from different perspectives (the end of Jesus’ earthly activities in Luke’s Gospel, and the beginning the disciples’ mission activities in Acts) and with different aims (belief in the resurrection in the Gospel; and the mission mandate in Acts)<sup>2</sup>. The fragment that is of particular interest for this study concerns the mission mandate given by Jesus to His disciples (Lk 24, 48; Ac 1, 8). The fragments in both speeches offer the context in which the main theme is presented, namely, the gift of the Holy Spirit that disciples are going to receive. This event is understood as the fulfilment of God’s promise (Lk 24, 49; Ac 1, 4)<sup>3</sup>. Since Jesus’ speech in Acts begins with His order that the apostles remain in Jerusalem until they receive the promise of God (the Holy Spirit) this indicates that the city will be a place where the inauguration of the messianic age will occur (Joel 2, 28–29)<sup>4</sup>. This long expected eschatological time, which was often a subject of Jesus’ teaching to His disciples, will be marked by baptism with the Holy Spirit, that not only in form but also in its purpose will be different from John’s baptism with water<sup>5</sup>. Due to the context of the speech, the group of those who will be baptized with the Holy Spirit is here limited to the group of Jesus’ disciples (Ac 1, 5), however the following narrative of Acts expands this group to all who believe in Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah (Ac 4, 31). The baptism of the disciples with the Holy Spirit will occur “*not many days from now*”, which means it will be very soon (Ac 2, 1–12), however this event will take place many times in different places and for different believers. Since the promise regarding the baptism in the Holy Spirit was a part of Jewish expectation concerning the messianic age, according to which

<sup>1</sup> The similarities: remain in Jerusalem (Ac 1, 4=Lk 24, 49); baptism in the Holy Spirit (Ac 1, 4–5. 8=Lk 24, 49); being witnesses to the whole world (Ac 1, 8=Lk 24, 47–48). Cf. J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*. New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2010, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> D.W. Palmer, The Literary Background of Acts 1, 1–4, *NTS* 1987:33, pp. 427–438.

<sup>3</sup> No particular text from the Old Testament is quoted here, however the possible reference can be Joel 2, 28–32, because this text is quoted also in Peter’s speech at Pentecost (Ac 2, 17–21). B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids – Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998, pp. 109–110.

<sup>4</sup> According to Gerhardsson, Jerusalem is the connecting element between Israel (the chosen nation) and the new Israel (the Christian Church). B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, ASNU 22 (Copenhagen: Eerdmans, 1961), pp. 214–220.

<sup>5</sup> Schnabel points out that the baptism of John signified repentance, removal of defilement and purification from sin, but baptism with the Holy Spirit would purge and restore the people of God by filling them with the power of the Holy Spirit. E.J. Schnabel, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012, pp. 74–75.

the restoration of the kingdom of Israel was of crucial importance, the question of the dispels is not out of place (v. 6)<sup>6</sup>. The question shows the disciples' conviction that Jesus is the Resurrected Messiah, who will restore the kingdom of the ancestors, but at the same time it shows their uncertainty concerning the time when the restoration will occur<sup>7</sup>. Jesus' answer does not contain a clear specification of the date, yet neither is it a refusal to provide information regarding this day<sup>8</sup>. Jesus transferred the disciples' focus from the level of socio-political interpretation of the messianic age to the level of a strictly soteriological meaning of baptism with the Holy Spirit. His answer indirectly indicates that the date of the restoration of the Israel is not His prerogative to decide but exclusively that of the Father<sup>9</sup>. It will certainly come, but the date will remain unknown to the disciples, which indicates that there will be a period of time between the beginning of the messianic age (baptism with the Holy Spirit) and the restoration of Israel (v. 11 – the Parousia of Jesus)<sup>10</sup>. This period is the time for the disciples to give testimony to Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah. The use of ἀλλὰ – *but* in verse 8 indicates a change of focus from the meaning of baptism with the Holy Spirit, into the practical purpose of the event. The reception of the power of the Holy Spirit, which in verse 5 was called baptism in the Holy Spirit, is realized in the narrative concerning the events of Pentecost (Ac 2, 1–13) and has great consequences for the disciples (in particular) and all who believe (in general)<sup>11</sup>. The consequences of the event regard the ability of the disciples to give testimony about Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah, which *de facto* makes them witnesses of Jesus. In this way, Jesus points to the Holy Spirit (divine power) as the source of human strength to give testimony, which makes the baptism with the Holy Spirit an irreplaceable condition for the witnesses. At the beginning of his narrative regarding the acts of Jesus' disciples, Luke directly presents the power of the Holy Spirit as the primary reason for the disciples' committed mission activities. Their task as the witnesses of the Resurrected Messiah will start in

<sup>6</sup> Some of the Old Testament texts are: Is 42, 1; 44, 3; 59, 21; Ez 36, 24–28; 37, 14; 39, 29; Joel 2, 28–3, 1. D.L. Tiede, "The Exaltation of Jesus and the Restoration of Israel in Acts 1," *HTR* 75: 1983, pp. 17–26.

<sup>7</sup> In this way Luke presents also the strong expectation of the Jews believing in Jesus, rather than of the apostles, that He is the Messiah who will very soon restore the kingdom of Israel. W. Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles*. London: Oliphants, 1973, pp. 65–66.

<sup>8</sup> Schnabel points to the fact that Jesus' answer is ambivalent and can be interpreted in four different ways: (1) rejection of the idea of an imminent end – E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, EKK, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971, p. 143; (2) reinterpretation of the restoration of the new Israel (the church) and not of Israel – R. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982, pp. 106–108; (3) there is no answer to the question, but instead there is an indication of the missionary activities that must be undertaken – J. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 201; (4) the Jews who believe in Jesus are the locus where the promise of God to His chosen nation was fulfilled – J. Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 18–43. See E. J. Schnabel, *Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 76–77.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, L.T. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Keener says that "the king would come twice, hence bringing the kingdom in two stages". C. S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*. Vol. 1 (1, 1–2, 47). Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015, p. 684.

<sup>11</sup> H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987, p. 6.

Jerusalem, the heart of Judaism, and this should be interpreted as the mission to the religious Jews living in Judea and representing Palestinian Judaism. The mission will expand to the neighbouring regions, here represented by Samaria, the place inhabited mostly by those who once were recognized as Jews, but now were excluded from Judaism, which makes this mission to be addressed to those who departed from Judaism<sup>12</sup>. The mission will continue to expand until it will reach the ends of the earth, which is a figurative expression indicating that there are no limits in giving testimony by the witnesses. This mission is addressed first at all to the Diaspora Jews (as the *modus operandi* of the witnesses indicates), but it does not exclude Gentiles, who are outside Judaism<sup>13</sup>. The fact that Gentiles are not explicitly mentioned in Ac 1, 8 does not suggest that they are excluded from those to whom the disciples have an obligation to give testimony, which is the interpretation attested by the contents of Acts, especially the narrative regarding Paul's mission activities<sup>14</sup>. In fact, the last part of Jesus' speech (v. 8) is none other than an outline of Acts. This verse indicates the structure of Luke's narrative, which begins with the mission activities of the disciples in Jerusalem (Ac 2–7), continues with the narrative concerning the disciples' testimony in Judea and Samaria (Ac 8–12), and ends with a very elaborate account concerning the mission to the Gentiles (Ac 13–28). Each of these stages in proclaiming the kerygma has its own specific parts, including the main topic, the main persons, and the purpose of the narrative. However, all serve to present Luke's evaluation of the witnesses.

### 3. The witnesses in Jerusalem

The first group of witnesses of Jesus the Resurrected Messiah is connected to the narrative regarding the mission in Jerusalem (Ac 1, 12–7, 60), where the narrative is clearly divided between the account concerning the proclaiming of the kerygma by the twelve (Ac 1, 12–4, 22) and the account regarding the conflict between the twelve and the Sanhedrin that led to the systematic persecution of the Way (Ac 4, 23–7, 60). Although both accounts are presented within the wider background of daily life of Jesus' believers in Jerusalem (Ac 1, 12–26; 2, 42–47; 4, 23–5, 11; 6, 1–7) where the general characteristic of the community is described, however each of the accounts has its own theme and a personality that are the main concerns of Luke's

<sup>12</sup> H. Conzelmann thinks that for Luke, Jerusalem represents the continuity between Israel and the church. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>13</sup> This interpretation is supported by the content of Acts, especially Ac 15–28. D. G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*. Nottingham: Eerdmans, 2009, pp. 112–113.

<sup>14</sup> Here we refer to the suggestion by Witherington that Gentiles are not clearly intended in Ac 1, 8. B. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 111). His suggestion caused by lack of information concerning this mission to Gentiles in Ac 1, 8, is not convincing. Rather, it is caused by the fact that Luke uses the names not in geographical, but in socio-theological terms. D. G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 112. Note that the structure of Acts is outlined in Ac 1, 8 since the mission in Jerusalem is the topic of the narrative through Ac 1–7, the mission in Judea and Samaria is the topic of Ac 8–12. 15, and the mission to the ends of the earth is the topic of Ac 13–14; 16–28.

narrative. In the first account Peter is clearly at the center. Although John is mentioned with Peter in almost every instance, in Luke's account all the speeches are delivered by Peter, and Peter is also the main agent of all the actions undertaken by the two. In the second account Peter is still central and the head of the persecuted apostles, however Luke introduces at the end of the section another person, Stephen, the first martyr (Ac 6, 5; 7, 1–60). In the whole section regarding the mission in Jerusalem, Peter delivers six speeches. In the case of the others, namely the twelve, one speech is delivered by Gamaliel, the Jerusalem community, and Stephen. The speeches of Peter and the speech of Stephen seem to be the most important *locus hermeneuticus* of Luke's presentation of the witnesses in Jerusalem. For this reason, in our study of the question of the witnesses a short presentation of these speeches is necessary.

### 3.1. Proclaiming the kerygma in Jerusalem

The Speech at Pentecost (Ac 2, 14–40) is the introductory speech in the group of three speeches (Ac 2, 14–40; 3, 12–26; 4, 8–12. 19–20) concerning the proclaiming of the kerygma by Peter in Jerusalem<sup>15</sup>. The main topic of these speeches is proclaiming Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah (Ac 2, 32. 36). In order to attest this claim Peter uses arguments based on Old Testament texts that are interpreted in a "Christological manner"<sup>16</sup>. He starts with the claim regarding the beginning of the eschatological times, since the gift of the Holy Spirit, according to Joel's prophecy, was given not only to the disciples of Jesus, but also to the whole of Israel. The Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus, who was crucified and died at the hands of the Romans, but also by the will of the authorities of the Jerusalem Temple who rejected Him as the Messiah. However, God Himself raised Jesus from the dead and raised Him at His right hand, which are two acts of recognition by God that Jesus is the Messiah. In this way, God Himself established Jesus as the Lord and Messiah for Israel (v. 31). This speech by Peter presents the kerygma proclaimed by him and the apostles in Jerusalem and will be the cause for conflict between the Twelve and the Sanhedrin<sup>17</sup>. It is important to note that the kerygma is entirely rooted in Jewish tradition despite the fact that the idea of the Resurrected Messiah is a significantly modified concept of the Messiah.

The Speech in the Portico of Solomon (Ac 3, 12–26) is the second speech by Peter in which he significantly developed the basic kerygma presented in the first speech (Ac 2, 14–40). The purpose of the first speech was to present Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah, who is established by God Himself as the Lord and Messiah for Israel, and who sent the Holy Spirit upon all Israel, not only to fulfil the promises of the God, but also to inaugurate the Messianic times. The purpose of the second speech is to make clear the responsibility of the Jews for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah (Ac 3, 12–16) and calling on them to correct this mistake by believing in Jesus

<sup>15</sup> Since in this study we are concerned with the witnesses we omit the first speech of Peter (Ac 1, 15–26) which concerns issues within the community of Jesus' believers.

<sup>16</sup> Keener stresses that the speech does not follow Hellenistic rhetorical patterns, but Luke's Peter uses the rhetorical style found in the LXX AND created by Jewish rhetorical tradition. C. S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*. Vol 1, p. 862.

<sup>17</sup> E.J. Schnabel, *Exegetical Commentary*, p. 126.

as the Resurrected Messiah (Ac 3, 17–26)<sup>18</sup>. The Jews' responsibility is attested by fact that they not only handed over Jesus to the Romans, but also by the fact that in spite of Pilate's attempt to free Jesus, they rejected Him, asking pardon instead for Barabbas (vv. 13–14). Their wrongdoing was exposed by God Himself, who raised Jesus from the dead, proving that Jesus is the Messiah chosen by Him. The miracle of healing the blind man is presented in Peter's speech as proof that Jesus is the Messiah and the Founder of the life (v. 14), as well as that faith in Jesus as the resurrected Messiah is a source of healing (Ac 3, 12, 16)<sup>19</sup>. In this way, Peter claims that Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah, is the source of life (understood here in general terms). However, Peter's exposure of the Jews' wrongdoing is not intended as condemnation, but as a call to them to recognize their mistake and to return to God (v. 19). Peter recognizes the Jews' ignorance regarding God's plan of salvation, which led them to rejection of the Messiah sent by God (vv. 17–18), and for this reason he calls them to repentance, which may bring them not only forgiveness of sins (v. 19) but also a second chance to accept Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah at the Parousia, when Jesus will come again (vv. 20–24)<sup>20</sup>. Peter's hope is based on two convictions shared by all Jews: that the Messiah first at all will be sent to the chosen nation; and that God's blessing is given first to the Jews through whom all nations will be blessed (vv. 25–26). From these comes Peter's conclusion that the Resurrected Messiah is first at all sent to the Jews (v. 26). In this way Peter encourages the Jews to believe in Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah, which indirectly suggests that rejection of Jesus as the Messiah is a temporary problem that can be corrected in the present (v. 26). However, verses 20–21 seem to suggest that Peter puts the issue of recognition of Jesus as the Messiah on an eschatological level (the day of the Parousia), which implies some doubt regarding the Jews' response to Peter's call<sup>21</sup>. It is important to notice that Peter recognized the Jews as those to whom Jesus the Resurrected Messiah was sent first at all.

The first speech of Peter before the Sanhedrin (Ac 4, 8–12, 19–20) is the third speech in Luke's narrative regarding proclaiming the kerygma by the apostles in Jerusalem. Compared with the two previous speeches, however, this one does not contribute much towards developing the kerygma beyond what has already been presented, but it contains an affirmation concerning the self-awareness of the Twelve of their being witnesses to the Resurrected Messiah (Ac 4, 19–20). The healing of the crippled man (Ac 3, 1–10) and the Peter's speech in the Portico of Salomon (Ac 3, 12–26) became the subject of the Sanhedrin's investigation, during which Peter had the opportunity to address the kerygma to the Sanhedrin, and basically does not differ from the kerygma as presented in the previous speeches of Peter. Here, however, Peter puts greater emphasis on a soteriological presentation of Jesus (Ac 4, 12)<sup>22</sup>. First, Peter openly blames the Sanhedrin and whole of Israel for Jesus'

<sup>18</sup> E.J. Schnabel, *Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 204–205.

<sup>19</sup> Conzelmann indicates that the term ἀρχηγός is paraphrased in Ac 26, 23 as πρῶτος ἐξ ἀναστάσεως, which refers the meaning of the term to the resurrected Jesus. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 180.

<sup>21</sup> L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids – Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1988, pp. 418–420.

<sup>22</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 93.



death, since they rejected Him who by the will of God shown in the resurrection is the cornerstone of Judaism but was rejected by those who have a responsibility for Judaism (Ps 118, 22). The soteriological aspect of Jesus is underlined by Peter in his declaration that there is no other way to be saved than by faith in Jesus. By this statement Peter insists that Jesus is the only Savior, not only for Jews but also for all nations. Naturally, this statement cannot be accepted by the Jewish authorities, and it becomes the source of disagreement between Peter and the Sanhedrin. The latter resorts to power by prohibiting the proclamation of this kind of teaching (Ac 4, 16–17). Peter, using a form of a rhetorical question, expressed a lack of willingness to obey the Sanhedrin's order, which in his opinion contradicts the will of God (Ac 4, 19). His argument is based on his strong conviction that he must give testimony to Jesus, since it is the will of God for him, as well as his own experience that he wishes to share. In this way, Peter undermined the authority of the Sanhedrin, considering it to be inferior to the will of God, which is the only and final authoritative standard he is willing to obey (v. 19)<sup>23</sup>.

For presenting the basic kerygma regarding Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah, Luke in his narrative used the three speeches of Peter, where the first one introduces Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah promised by God, the second presents the Resurrected Messiah as the One sent for Israel, and the third one offers a strictly Christ-oriented soteriology with a universal character. These three speeches sum up the general outline of the kerygma proclaimed by Peter (and the Twelve) in Jerusalem, which was not accepted by the Sanhedrin (representing Israel), and which led in the end to antagonism and conflict, and after that the apostles refused to obey the Sanhedrin. Peter gave testimony to Jesus before the people of Jerusalem and the authorities of Judaism, but it was not accepted by the Sanhedrin.

### 3.2. The conflict in Jerusalem

The Sanhedrin's rejection of the kerygma proclaimed by the Twelve, on the one hand, and the no-compromise attitude of the twelve, on the other hand, led directly to open conflict between these two groups. This conflict created a new environment for proclaiming the kerygma in Jerusalem, which naturally affected the way the apostles gave witness to the Resurrected Messiah. The Sanhedrin acts against the apostles, imprisoning them in the public prison (Ac 5, 17–18), but divine intervention freed the apostles in order to continue proclaiming of the kerygma (Ac 5, 19–20). In this way Luke shows that God is on side of the Twelve. Soon, the apostles were arrested again (Ac 5, 26), but this time in order to face the Sanhedrin, which interpreted the whole situation as an attempt by the apostles to make them responsible for Jesus' death (Ac 5, 28). Peter's answer to the Sanhedrin's queries contain some statements (Ac 5, 31) that go further than making the Sanhedrin responsible for Jesus' death, or claiming that Jesus is the Resurrected Messiah (Ac 5, 30). Peter's statements that Jesus is on the right-hand

<sup>23</sup> Scholars often offer an analogy with the famous response of Socrates, as seen in discussions concerning Luke's narrative creativity, with possible influences coming from Greek literature. However, since Socrates' dilemma and Peter's dilemma were of the same nature (human or divine authority), for those who maintained their freedom in the faith, the answer can only be the same, which indicates rather analogy than dependence between these two famous statements. R.J. Longenecker, *Acts*, p. 778.

of God and established as founder (leader) and savior for Israel, were a direct reason for the Sanhedrin's desire to execute the apostles on a charge of blasphemy. Because of the intervention of Gamaliel this was not carried out immediately, but it would soon be the fate of Stephen and many other followers of Jesus (Ac 7, 54–60; 8, 1–3)<sup>24</sup>.

The Second Speech of Peter before the Sanhedrin (Ac 5, 29–32) begins with Peter's fearless declaration to the Sanhedrin that he would disobey them in order to follow faithfully Jesus' command (Ac 1, 8). He did this using a more direct and uncompromising expression than the form in Ac 4, 19–20, where it is a rhetorical question<sup>25</sup>. This statement is followed by a summary presentation (similar to a creed) of the kerygmatic teaching that has appeared in the speeches regarding the proclamation of the kerygma in Jerusalem (Ac 2, 14–40; 3, 12–26; 4, 8–12, 19–20). In this creed, Peter clearly states that Jesus was rejected and put to the death by the Sanhedrin (representing Judaism), however, He was resurrected by God, who exalted Jesus to His right hand in order to establish Him to be the founder and savior of life, who will bring to Israel repentance and forgiveness of their sins<sup>26</sup>. The last sentence of the speech explains the bold character of Peter's refusal to obey the will of the Sanhedrin (v. 29), since Peter's behavior comes not from his antipathy towards the Sanhedrin or Judaism, but from the duty of the Twelve to be the witnesses to the Resurrected Messiah<sup>27</sup>. This witness to the Resurrected Messiah is given by the Twelve, as well as by the Holy Spirit bestowed on them, and also by all who obey God by believing in Jesus. Indirectly it indicates that not only the apostles but also all believers are the witnesses to the Resurrected Messiah. The Twelve and also all believers are able to give testimony to Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah because they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's promise for His people. In a negative sense, those who have not received the Holy Spirit cannot give this testimony to Jesus, the resurrected Messiah, whereas those who do give witness, do so it because of the power of the Holy Spirit (Ac 2, 4; 4, 7; 4, 31). It makes the Holy Spirit to be the source of courage and power for all witnesses of Jesus.

The direct result of Peter's speech (Ac 5, 29–32) was to provoke the anger of the members of the Sanhedrin who wished to put Peter and John to death. During the meeting of the Sanhedrin, the respected teacher Gamaliel gave a surprising speech (Ac 5, 35–39) that calmed the members and led them to abandon their intent to execute the apostles. The convincing argument used by Gamaliel raises the possibility that the movement of the Nazarenes might be of divine origin, which means that it is not only recognized by God but first at all God Himself is the source of the movement. If this be the case, the opposition of the Sanhedrin would mean opposition to God Himself<sup>28</sup>. Gamaliel reminds the members of similar messianic movements

<sup>24</sup> The apostle James was beheaded by king Herod Agrippa I, who wished also to hand over Peter to the people (Ac 12, 1–5).

<sup>25</sup> L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 98.

<sup>26</sup> This statement presents Jesus as "*the one who authors or pioneers salvation by being the first to rise from the dead*", C. S. Keener, *Acts*, vol. 2, p. 1219.

<sup>27</sup> E. J. Schnabel, *Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 312–313.

<sup>28</sup> These words make it possible to recognize that Gamaliel was sympathetic to the way, which he accepts as being



from the recent past that began with great dynamism and then suddenly disappeared after the leaders of the movements were killed. By this reminder, Gamaliel suggests that the movement of Jesus might be of human origin, like many others, and it would disappear naturally with no need for the Sanhedrin's involvement. In other words, Gamaliel suggests that the members of the Sanhedrin adopt a passive attitude toward the apostles, instead of acting on impulse and so create a conflict with those citizens of Jerusalem who supported the Way (Ac 5, 26)<sup>29</sup>. The content of Gamaliel's speech does not prove his sympathy towards the apostles; it shows his very rational approach to the issue<sup>30</sup>. Although Gamaliel's speech calmed the emotions of the Sanhedrin's members, and saved the apostles' lives, it did not, however, save them from physical punishment. This is the first instance where the Sanhedrin resorts to the use of force and invokes their power in the conflict with the Twelve. For the first time in Luke's narrative the apostles' witness to the Resurrected Messiah takes the form of physical punishment<sup>31</sup>.

The last episode regarding the conflict between the Twelve and the Sanhedrin, concerns Stephen, one of "the seven" in the Jerusalem community appointed to serve the material needs of the believers (Ac 6, 1-7). Stephen was known to be a disciple "full of grace and power", who performed miracles and wonders (Ac 6, 8), and he was also involved in discussions with the Diaspora Jews who gathered in the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Ac 6, 9-15). This last activity led in the end to his being accused by his opponents, who fabricated witnesses who testified falsely to his crimes against the Mosaic Law and the Jerusalem Temple (Ac 6, 13)<sup>32</sup>. Consequently, Stephen faced trial before the Sanhedrin, which he took as an opportunity to give testimony to the Resurrected Messiah, and in this way to fulfil his duty as a witness. To the charges presented by the accusers, Stephen responded directly only at the end of his

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authorized by God. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 43; D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 226.

<sup>29</sup> If Gamaliel really was sympathetic to the movement, the fact that in the end the Sanhedrin followed his advice would mean that they also in some way recognized the movement. But this supposition contrasts sharply with the narrative in Ac 5, 40-42, where the escalation of their hostility toward the Twelve is shown by the order that the disciples be lashed. E. J. Schnabel, *Exegetical Commentary*, p. 317.

<sup>30</sup> Scholars often draw attention to the grammar of verse 39, which may suggest that Luke/Gamaliel is actually thinking about the divine origin of the movement. B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 235. However, at the same time they overlook the consequences of such interpretation of verse 39, the Sanhedrin's agreement with Gamaliel's advice (at the end of verse 39), as well as the importance of the narrative context of Ac 5, 26 and Ac 5, 39-42.

<sup>31</sup> The narrative regarding Gamaliel's speech prepares the ground for the narrative regarding Stephen's death, and for this reason Luke uses the speech to indicate that, despite the opposition and harsh treatment from the side of the Sanhedrin, the systematic persecution of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem was not initiated by the temple authorities (by their official pronouncement of the death penalty on the leaders). This, however, does not mean that they did not take part in the persecution that was provoked by the stoning of Stephen by the crowd.

<sup>32</sup> Concerning the charge of crime against the Temple, Stephen, in a very general manner, answers that God does not dwell in buildings. This answer can be interpreted as an indirect offense to the Temple in which God was dwelling in His people. Concerning the accusation of crime against the Law Stephen in fact gives no answer. C.S. Keener, *Acts*, vol. 2, pp. 1328-1329.

speech (Ac 7, 2–53. 56. 59–60), which generally refers to Moses, the servant of God (Ac 7, 2–50)<sup>33</sup>. In the few last verses, Stephen in a bold manner, though in very general terms, accused the Israelites of betraying the Righteous One, thus naturally provoking their anger against him (Ac 7, 54). However, Stephen's criticism of the accusers and the Sanhedrin was not the direct reason for his stoning<sup>34</sup>. The reason for Jews' impulsive action against Stephen (Ac 7, 57–58) was his ecstatic vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, which claim was naturally considered by the Jews to be blasphemy (Ac 7, 56). Luke's narrative suggests that the Sanhedrin passed no sentence on Stephen, and that his stoning was caused by the anger of the Jews from Jerusalem and the Diaspora. Since the speech of Stephen is the last episode in the narrative regarding the conflict in Jerusalem, the case of Stephen indicates that the persecution of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem (Ac 8, 1–3) was initiated by the crowd's spontaneous reaction to Stephen's vision, rather than by a decision of the Temple authorities<sup>35</sup>.

### Summing up

The main protagonist of the narrative regarding the proclaiming of the kerygma in Jerusalem is Peter, who acts as the head of the twelve, or leader of the mission team (Peter/John), and the main adversary is the Sanhedrin. His testimony to the Resurrected Messiah is always presented in the context of testimony given by whole community in Jerusalem. Peter is the one who makes in an authoritative manner the most crucial decisions concerning the life of the community, as well as the testimony the community gives in Jerusalem. Supported by the decision of the whole community, in the course of the conflict, he chose obedience to Jesus' order (Ac 1, 8) rather than to the authorities of Judaism. This decision has its consequences, and the growing antagonism against the movement will reach climax in the stoning of Stephen. Stephen is the only one member of the Jerusalem community who is mentioned by Luke as acting individually and independently. His honest testimony to the Resurrected Messiah costs him his life.

<sup>33</sup> This extensive and very well-elaborated speech (Ac 7, 2–46) regards the history of Israel from Abraham to Moses, where Stephen presents Joseph and Moses as the examples of people rejected by their brethren but established by God as the saviors of the chosen nation. Lukan Stephen uses the examples of Moses and Joseph as the types of rejected servants of God, in order to present Jesus (the anti-type) as the One rejected and betrayed by the Sanhedrin (Israel). D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 251 and p. 259.

<sup>34</sup> Luke uses the expression "*they were enraged*" to describe the crowd's attitude towards Stephen, which is similar to the one used in Ac 5, 33, where the attitude of the Sanhedrin towards Peter and John is related. Use of another expression "*they ground their teeth against him*" indicates that the ground for radical action against Stephen was prepared. L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 139.

<sup>35</sup> Fitzmyer includes the Sanhedrin among Stephen's opponents, but the text of Ac 7, 1–60 does not justify this interpretation, presenting the Sanhedrin in strictly juridical manner. J. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 393.

#### 4. The witnesses in Judea and Samaria

The persecution in Jerusalem caused a general exodus of the believers (Ac 8, 1), which indirectly shows that the persecutors reached their goal. According to Luke, only the Twelve stayed in Jerusalem as witnesses to the Resurrected Messiah, and the others fled to safer places, bringing with them their conviction regarding the person of Jesus. In this way (more by way of consequence than as the result of a deliberate decision) the mission outside Jerusalem began without the active participation of the apostles, and the second level of spreading the God News was initiated. The first protagonist in Luke's narrative regarding the mission in Judea and Samaria is Philip, one of the seven (Ac 6, 5) whose activities in Samaria (Ac 8, 5–13) prepared the ground for the fruitful work of Peter and John (Ac 8, 14–25). Although Philip's testimony to Jesus in Samaria can be recognized as being an unwitting consequence of his flight from Jerusalem, his activities in Gaza and then in Azotus and Caesarea are the result of his obedience to divine order (the angle of God) and the Holy Spirit (Ac 28, 26. 39). Philip's testimony to Jesus helped those who once were part of Judaism, and those Gentiles who were inclined towards Judaism, or already proselytes, to the recognition based on the Scripture that Jesus of Nazareth is really the Resurrected Messiah.

The second witness to the Resurrected Messiah in the narrative regarding the mission in Judea and Samaria is Saul, the former persecutor of the Way, who after his conversion zealously proclaimed Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah (Ac 9, 1–19). In the case of Saul, who will become Paul, will be the subject of Luke's extensive presentation in the narrative regarding the mission to the ends of the earth (Ac 13–28), the presentation here is limited only to the beginning of his testimony to Resurrected Jesus. It starts in the place of his conversion, the city of Damascus, where he spent three years proclaiming to the Diaspora Jews that Jesus is the Son of God (Ac 9, 20), something they would least expect to hear from a devoted persecutor of the Way. The testimony of Saul was not generally accepted by the Jews in Damascus (Ac 9, 23), although Luke mentions some disciples (the believers) who helped Saul (Ac 9, 25)<sup>36</sup>. The reason for rejecting the testimony was Saul's claim that Jesus is the Messiah (Ac 9, 22), a claim that the local Jewish community found very disturbing<sup>37</sup>. Luke presents Saul as the witness to the Resurrected Messiah, however he writes nothing about Saul's achievement in the mission in this city. It does not necessarily mean that Saul achieved nothing in Damascus, but it rather indicates the main message included in Luke's narrative: Saul, who caused many to be fugitives because of their faith in Jesus, was now himself a fugitive because of the same faith.

After leaving Damascus, Saul had no choice other than go back to Jerusalem, where who could not expect any assistance from the Sanhedrin or his former co-persecutors, and for this

<sup>36</sup> Ananias is the only person from the Damascus community who is mentioned in Ac 9, 1–28; 22, 12. 16, and this is most probably due to the function he played in the process of Saul's transformation after his conversion. There is no mention of Saul's cooperation with the members of the community in connection with the mission activities.

<sup>37</sup> It is clear that Saul had to leave the city because of the mission activities, and in order to save his life, however there is no information about the consequences that Saul's activity had on the community.

reason he was seeking help from those who he had been persecuting. His attempt to associate with the disciples was not immediately successful, since even after three years there remained strong suspicion on the side of the Jesus' followers who could not believe in his good intention and remained cautious in his regard<sup>38</sup>. The only person who gave assistance to Saul was Barnabas, a Jew of the diaspora from Cyprus who had moved to Jerusalem (Ac 9, 27). He became Saul's mentor and the agent of his integration into the Jerusalem community, just as he will do again later with the Antioch community. As in Damascus, also in Jerusalem Saul was teaching in the name of Jesus and arguing with Greek-speaking Jews, who, however, rejected his kerygma and his arguments. Luke gives no indication that Saul met with any success in Jerusalem; on the contrary he makes it clear that it was necessary for Saul to leave Jerusalem in order to save his life (Ac 9, 28–30). Saul was forced to leave for his hometown Tarsus where he probably remained for several years waiting for another chance. The summary following the account of Saul's stay in Jerusalem (Ac 9, 31) gives the impression that to some extent the ensuing peace, or at least lack of persecution in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, is to be understood as related in some way to Saul's return to Tarsus.

In Luke's narrative Saul is presented as the witness to the Resurrected Messiah, who in spite of great efforts achieved little success (Damascus), and whose presence created considerable inconvenience for the community (Jerusalem). How far this presentation of Saul reflects reality is difficult to determine, but from the narrative perspective Luke makes it clear that Saul's integration into the community of Jesus' followers was not without difficulties, and his zeal for proclaiming the kerygma brought more trouble for him than good results for the Way (Ac 9, 23, 29).

The last personality in Luke's narrative regarding the testimony of the witnesses in Judea and Samaria is again Peter, who is the most important witness to the Resurrected Messiah. He was central to the process of transforming this messianic movement within Judaism into a universally oriented messianic community. This time Peter acts individually, on the orders only of the Lord (Ac 10, 9–16) and later on the orders of the Holy Spirit (Ac 10, 19–20). According to Luke's narrative, from the very beginning the event is arranged by God acting at the same time on both sides (Cornelius and Peter) in order to make it possible that they meet (Ac 10, 3–6, 13–16) and then that they accept each other (Ac 10, 34). Peter pays a visit to the house of Cornelius, a Roman soldier dwelling in Caesarea (Ac 10, 1–2, 22), probably without fully understanding of meaning of this visit, but obeying the will of God, as his bold statement concerning the prohibition of association with Gentiles seems to indicate (Ac 10, 28–29). During this visit, which closes the border for Peter on the question of relations between Jews and Gentiles, Peter gave the speech (Ac 10, 28–29, 34–43, 47). It consists of an account concerning Jesus' life (vv. 36–38), the teaching of Jesus (vv. 39–40), and the declaration that the apostles as the true witnesses to the Resurrected Messiah (Ac 10, 39a, 41–43)<sup>39</sup>. The speech,

<sup>38</sup> Information concerning the disciples (other than the apostles) in Jerusalem indicates that after Saul left Jerusalem for Damascus some followers of Jesus returned to Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup> J. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 459–460.

however, contains the very important statement that is of crucial value in the recognition of the Gentiles as the people chosen by God because of their faith. In the statement Peter recognizes that God shows no partiality towards peoples (Ac 10, 34–35), and everyone from every nation is accepted by Him if he obeys Him and acts according to His will<sup>40</sup>. Since the house of Cornelius fulfilled these conditions by obeying the order of the angel (Ac 10, 1–8), and then by their acceptance of Peter's teaching concerning Jesus (Ac 10, 34–43), it is ready to be included in the people of God (Ac 10, 47). Peter's decision to baptize the house of Cornelius (Ac 10, 48) does not come from his own initiative, but from the affirmation of their faith in Jesus by God, who granted them the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ac 10, 44–46). The natural order of the events leading to inclusion into the community of the Jesus' followers required first baptism with water and then baptism by the Holy Spirit (Ac 8, 12–17), however in case of the house of Cornelius the order is reversed, not by the will of Peter but by the will of God Himself (Ac 10, 47)<sup>41</sup>. This event was a sufficiently convincing argument for Peter to accept the household of Cornelius within the community of Jesus' followers, which was still dominated by believers with a Jewish background (Ac 6, 5; 8, 36–38). In Luke's narrative Peter is the witness who is the first to understand that the will of God was to include Gentiles within the people of God based solely on their faith in Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah (Ac 10, 40), without their prior conversion to Judaism. Peter is also the witness with a very strong consciousness of the duty of the apostles to give the testimony about Jesus' death and resurrection (Ac 10, 39–43).

The action of Peter was not readily accepted by Jesus' followers who came from a background in Judaism (Ac 11, 2), which *de facto* meant the majority of the Jerusalem community (Ac 11, 1–4). Without knowledge of Peter's reasons for visiting the house of the Gentiles they evaluated his action as a breach of the regulation of the Mosaic Law, which indirectly indicates a strong conviction concerning the role of Judaism in the new Israel or the renewed Israel. Because of the opposition from some members of the community in Jerusalem, Peter was forced to give an apologetic speech (Ac 11, 5–17), which contains a summary of the account presented already in Ac 10, 1–48. Peter's apology underlines the Holy Spirit's direct order to Peter (Ac 11, 12), which indicates the divine origin of his action<sup>42</sup>. According to Luke/Peter, God takes responsibility not only for Peter visiting the house of Cornelius, but also for the baptism of the whole household (Ac 11, 17)<sup>43</sup>. Peter's reasoning goes further than what was required by the accusation of his opponents required, since he not only explained the reason for visiting the Gentile's house (which was known to the opponents) but also provides a new information concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit given to the Gentiles (Ac 11, 15) and the baptism of Cornelius (Ac 11, 16–17). In the conclusion of this apology,

<sup>40</sup> D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 335–336.

<sup>41</sup> L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 194.

<sup>42</sup> C.S. Keener, *Acts*, vol. 2, pp. 1816–1817.

<sup>43</sup> God by the vision prepared Peter for the event at Cornelius house (Ac 11, 5–10). The Holy Spirit ordered Peter to go to Caesarea (Ac 11, 12). God gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles in the same manner as it did to the Twelve (Ac 11, 15–17).

Peter underlines that since his proclaiming the kerygma to Cornelius the Gentile soldier and the effect of this proclaiming were parts of God's plan for Peter, there was no other option for him but to obey (Ac 11, 17). The success of Peter's apology does not necessarily mean that all prejudices concerning the relation between Jews and Gentiles within the group of Jesus' believers were immediately overcome (as Ac 15 shows)<sup>44</sup>. Although the inclusion of Gentiles among Jesus' followers, without the requirement to convert to Judaism, but only on the basis of their faith in Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah, was not an authoritative decision by Peter, Luke strongly suggests that Peter is the witness by whom this divine plan was implemented, and who convinced the community in Jerusalem to accept this as being the will of God, which was attested by the same gift of the Holy Spirit that was given to those who came from Judaism and from Gentiles<sup>45</sup>. As in the narrative concerning the witnesses in Jerusalem, Luke presents Peter as the head of the Twelve, acting always communally (together with the Twelve, with the community or with other apostles) in cases concerning Jews, or those who were very close to Judaism, so also in the case of Cornelius the Gentile, Peter acts communally (Ac 11, 12). However, Luke presents Peter as acting in very individual manner that suggests that it was an independent and authoritative decision, made on the basis of the divine order, but without consultation with the Twelve.

### Summing up

In the narrative concerning proclaiming the testimony to the Resurrected Messiah in Jerusalem Peter is the central personality in Luke's account, who always acts communally as the head of the community or the mission group<sup>46</sup>. In the narrative concerning the mission in Samaria, although Peter remains at the center of the narrative, Luke includes two others, Philip and Saul. This expands the narrative from the narrow nuclear community in Jerusalem, dominated by the Twelve, to the widely spread movement active in many places and socio-political contexts, where those who are not counted among the Twelve also give testimony to the Resurrected Messiah.

The narrative concerning the mission in Samaria has its own theme. In the narrative concerning the mission in Jerusalem the main theme is proclaiming Jesus as the Resurrected Messiah, and this theme remains imported also in the narrative concerning Judea and Samaria, but Luke gives more attention to the theme already included in the narrative concerning Jerusalem, but more fully developed here, namely, the gift of Holy Spirit. This gift is now presented as the most important guarantee of the God will. In Peter's speech to Simon (Ac 8, 20-23) Luke's shows that the gift of God is given based of faith, and not on human desire. The gift of the Holy Spirit is exclusively the prerogative of God, and He shares this prerogative with

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<sup>44</sup> Chapter 15 of Acts, as well as the Letter to Galatians show that problem concerning association between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians remained a challenge for much longer. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>45</sup> D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 341-342.

<sup>46</sup> The only exception from the general rule of Luke's approach is Stephen, the witness who became the first martyr.



those whom He has chosen<sup>47</sup>. The success of the mission in Samaria forced the Jerusalem community to send the apostles so that the believers in Samaria might also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit by their hands (Ac 8, 15–17). Indirectly, in this way, Luke distinguishes between proclaiming the kerygma, that is a duty for all believers (Ac 8, 4–13), and giving the gift of the Holy Spirit that is a prerogative reserved to the apostles (Ac 8, 14–17). In the case of the Cornelius' house (Ac 10, 1–48), where Gentiles (not yet baptized) received the gift of the Holy Spirit based on their faith in Jesus the Resurrected Messiah, that is known only to God Himself, the gift is not given to them by Peter but directly by God<sup>48</sup>. This is the most important statement that, according to Luke, sanctions the direct acceptance of Gentiles among the community of Jesus' followers: it depends not on the will of man, but on the will of God.

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<sup>47</sup> Barrett, C.K. "Light on the Holy Spirit from Simon Magus (Acts 8, 4–25)." In *Les Actes des Apôtres: traditions, rédaction, théologie*, edited by J. Kremer, pp. 281–295. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979, p. 340.

<sup>48</sup> B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 340.